

CADAIR IDRIS

Site Guides for Recreation
Protected Landscapes of Wales



1. CADAIR IDRIS



Introduction

Cadair Idris is one of Wales's most iconic upland landscapes. As Wales's 18th highest peak, it is regarded as the outdoor 'honeypot' location of Southern Snowdonia. On a good day the views stretch far and wide: west to the Barmouth estuary, east to the Cambrian Mountains, south to the Brecon Beacons, and north to the Rhinogydd and the main Snowdonia massifs. What makes Cadair Idris so special, apart from it being rich in stories, myth and legend, is its array of biological, geological and landform features.

Designation

Cadair Idris NNR lies within the Snowdonia National Park and is part of the Cadair Idris SAC and SSSI. Covering 5500ha it is one of the largest SSSIs in Wales. This encompasses Cadair Idris mountain and the lower slopes, which are a mosaic of sessile oak woodlands, wet meadows, upland habitats and grassland. The reserve is managed by **Natural Resources Wales (NRW)**.

The European Union have identified the most important sites for wildlife in Europe as the **Natura 2000** sites. There are two types of Natura 2000 sites:

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** designated because of rare or migratory birds and their habitats.

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** for a wide range of habitats and species other than birds.

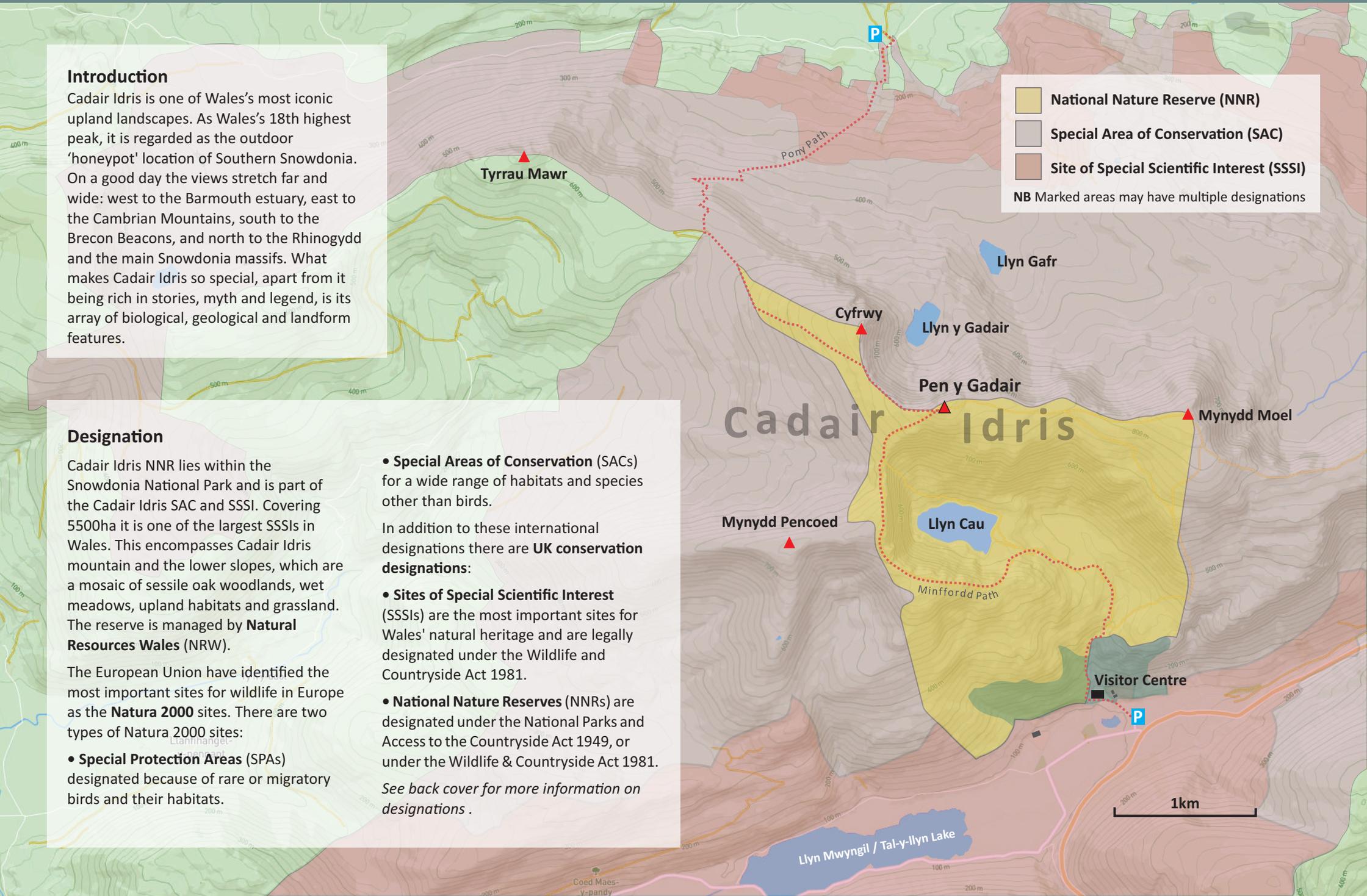
In addition to these international designations there are **UK conservation designations**:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** are the most important sites for Wales' natural heritage and are legally designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- **National Nature Reserves (NNRs)** are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, or under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

See back cover for more information on designations .

- National Nature Reserve (NNR)**
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

NB Marked areas may have multiple designations





Spring One of the first signs of spring is the **primrose** and **wood anemone** coming into flower. The star-like white flowers of the wood anemone with 5-8 petals are poisonous to humans! Its Welsh name, *blodyn y gwynt* 'wind flower' reflects its latin root of the word anemone (anemos / wind). They are surprisingly slow to spread, only 6 feet in a hundred years, relying on the growth of its root structure rather than the spread of its seeds. Because of this it is a good indicator of ancient woodland.

wood anemone



Myth The large boulders, **Cerrig Tewion**, translated to 'fat stones', on the lower slopes by Llyn Cau are said to be the irritating pebbles the giant Idris kicked out from his shoe!

ermine



Winter High winds and freezing temperatures create difficult living conditions. **Stoats** are a rare sighting during the colder months, hunting prey amongst the scree of Llyn Cau in their white, winter coat. Their collective noun is a 'gang of stoats', even though they are typically solitary hunters. Often referred to as **ermine** in their white coats, stoats were widely hunted for their luxurious warm fur, in the 15th Century by Catholic monarchs.

Summer The classic trio of Welsh oakwood birds; the **pied flycatcher**, **wood warbler** and **redstart** can be heard in the ancient woodland at the foot of the Minffordd path. July is *Gorffennaf* in Welsh, the end of summer. The flycatcher lingers a week beyond this, feeding on the oakwood caterpillars, then quite suddenly they are gone and the woods fall silent.

rôche moutonnée



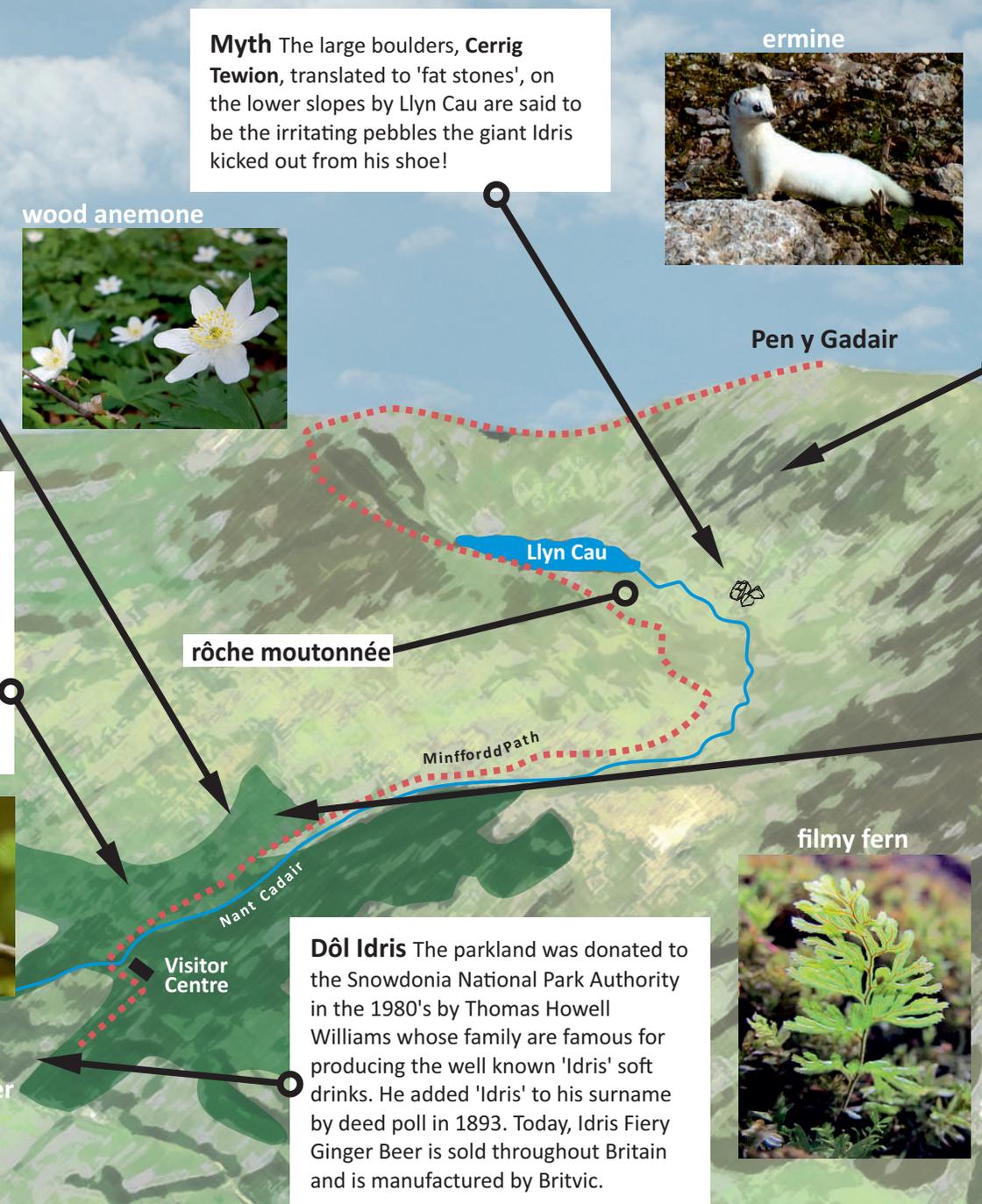
- ▣ redstart
- ▣ pied flycatcher
- ▣ woodwarbler

Dôl Idris The parkland was donated to the Snowdonia National Park Authority in the 1980's by Thomas Howell Williams whose family are famous for producing the well known 'Idris' soft drinks. He added 'Idris' to his surname by deed poll in 1893. Today, Idris Fiery Ginger Beer is sold throughout Britain and is manufactured by Britvic.

filmy fern



Autumn The dense canopy of **sessile oak** trees, with **ash, lime, hazel, birch** and **alder**, at the foot of the Minffordd Path is an area of internationally rare habitat known as temperate rainforest. Its proximity to the relatively warm Atlantic Ocean, and the abundant rainfall swells Nant Cadair, increasing the humidity making the conditions ideal for several rare species of moss. Wales' smallest fern, **Wilson's filmy fern** and the **Tunbridge filmy fern** thrive in these dark, damp conditions. The ferns are often tangled with mosses which disguise their presence. The thin translucent leaves with veins growing right to the tip are a key characteristic.





GEOLOGY & LANDSCAPE

Landscape The landscapes of Cadair Idris are some of the most dramatic in Snowdonia; this wild and rugged place is full of clues about the formation of the mountain. Charles Darwin visited Cadair Idris to study the effects of glaciation when forming his theories about the age of the earth.

Rôche moutonnée At the entrance to Llyn Cau is a large, smooth boulder called a 'Rôche moutonnée' which was formed by glacial action when the glacier flowed over and around a particularly resistant outcrop of rock. The upstream side of the rock was ground smooth by ice and rock debris, the action being called 'abrasion', whereas the downstream side was made steep and rough from the ice falling away around it, called 'plucking'. Lines or 'striations' on the rock's surface are tell-tale signs to signify the direction the ice was moving in.

Llyn Cau Over 460 million years ago, deep under the sea, volcanic activity forged the hard and resistant rocks at the core of the mountain, whilst softer rocks were formed from layers of mud and silt on the floors of the surrounding seas. 11,000 years ago when the ice from the last ice age melted, the glaciers scoured and scraped at the hard unfolded rock. The immense power of ice flowing under gravity gouged out Llyn Cau, one of the deepest lakes in Wales - nearly 50m at its deepest point. The lake is made deeper by a natural dam formed from rocky deposits left when the glacier melted.



BIRDS



▲ **Chough** Look out for the chough, the rarest member of the crow family, who occasionally visits the cropped grassy slopes to forage for insects and grubs. Three quarters of the UK chough population live in North Wales, predominantly on sea cliffs. Their Welsh name *brân goesgoch* means red-legged crow. During the 17th Century the chough would have been common in the UK. Legend has it that the soul of King Arthur departed this world in the form of a chough, its red feet and bill signifying Arthur's violent and bloody end.

► **Wheatears** are ground dwelling birds with a white rump and black 'T' shape to its tail. They can be seen hopping or running along the open, rocky ground of



Cadair Idris. Being migratory birds they travel thousands of miles from their winter sites in Central Africa. The Welsh name for wheatear is *tinwen y garn*, perfectly describing it as a 'white rumped bird of the rocks'.

▼ **Peregrine falcons** hunt high on the crags of Cadair Idris. Known as *hebog tramor* in Welsh, which directly translates to 'foreign hawk'.



▼ **Ring ouzels** are called *mwyalchen y mynydd* in Welsh, which means 'mountain blackbird' and are actually members of the thrush family. They are summer migrants to the UK, having flown from North Africa, following the seasonal growth of the juniper berry. They are predominantly an upland bird in steep decline due to changes in their British habitat.





MYTH, HISTORY & CULTURE

Cadair Idris, the 'Chair of Idris', is made up of the summit, Pen y Gadair (*head of the chair*) and Cyfrwy (*the saddle*). The chair was created by Idris himself to sit and view the heavens!

Annwn With its changeable inclement weather, dramatic peaks and swirling cloud, it is not surprising why in Welsh mythology, Cadair Idris takes on a more malevolent reputation. It is said to be the hunting ground of Gwyn ap Nudd, Lord of the Celtic underworld Annwn and his frightening, red eared other-worldly dogs. The howling of these great dogs is a portend of death for those who hear it, as it is believed the pack 'herded' the person's soul into the underworld.



Idris The name Idris appears in many guises in the Welsh tradition - as a giant, a prince and an astronomer. Local folklore associated with the mountain describes Idris as the mythologised warrior King of Meirionnydd, Idris Gawr. There were several other giants in the Welsh tradition along with Idris, all of them have mountains named after them near Cadair Idris. As stories unfold did Idris' renown or military prowess make him a 'giant amongst men' and cause him to be immortalised as the giant of Cadair Idris?

Wolves were present in Wales during the Middle Ages up until 17th Century. Some claim to have seen the last wolves in Wales high in a cave on the western flanks of Cadair Idris in 1786.

Paned o De Just below the rocky summit knoll there is a solid stone hut. It is a modern version of a 19th century hut that was made famous by an old lady who would climb early in the morning to the summit and provide a cup of tea (*paned o de*) to all those who visited. It is said, those who venture up the mountain at night should take heed before sleeping on its slopes, you will wake either as a madman or a poet!

Pony Path Long ago a man used to travel from Dolgellau to the summit of Cadair Idris on his pack mule, to sell lemonade and sandwiches to tourists. The route he took is now called the Pony Path, despite its classification as a footpath not a bridleway!

BATS, BEES & BROOM

Arctic Plants Cliff-dwelling arctic-alpine plants such as purple saxifrage and dwarf willow are usually found in the cold climes of the Arctic and at the great heights of the Alps. They grow in mats or cushions and have short flowering seasons to keep them safeguarded from the dramatic weather of the mountain. Did you know, some species on Cadair grow here at their most southerly location, whilst in flower at the same time is the locally rare, hairy greenweed (a type of broom), not seen anywhere further north.

Bats Careful management of the roof space in the NRW visitor centre has created an ideal breeding roost for one of Britain's smallest bats. The rare lesser horseshoe bat gets its name from its distinctive horseshoe-shaped nose, which they use in echolocation. Hibernating in winter, lesser horseshoe bats are native, rare and endangered in Wales, they are a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which details the action needed to halt the decline in the most threatened species and habitats in the UK.

Bees The **bilberry bumblebee** is sometimes called the mountain bumblebee due to it being a cold-tolerant species of uplands and moorlands. Only found above a 300m elevation, they tend to nest in the base of heather or bilberry plants, with the queen emerging from hibernation in April. Keep your eyes out for a flash of their bright red/orange abdomens and the lemon yellow bands on their chest.





Maps

- OS Landranger map: OS124: Porthmadog and Dolgellau
- OS Explorer map: OL23: Cadair Idris & Bala Lake / Llyn Tegid

Many Welsh names describe in detail types of terrain, habitats and identifying features. Some place names refer to historical events or people, or are associated with local legends. Welsh names help to better understand, respect and value the heritage and culture of the sites in which we work. More information can be found on the last page of this document.

Access

The main access to Cadair Idris is via the Dôl Idris car park which is between Dolgellau and Machynlleth off the A487. The OS grid reference is SH 732 115. Dôl Idris car park is situated near the junction of the B4405 and the A487. The NRW Visitor Centre here houses a seasonal cafe and offers an excellent pre- or post- walk base, with an exhibition showcasing the wildlife, geology and legends of Cadair Idris National Nature Reserve. The car park is managed by the Snowdonia National Park Authority and there is a parking charge. Alternatively, from Dolgellau another popular route up Cadair is via the Pony Path (Llwybr Pilin Pwn) starting from the pay and display carpark at Ty Nant SH 697153.

Contact

Points of contact: Snowdonia National Park Warden Service 01766 770274 or 01341 422 878 and ask for the Cadair Idris Wardens. NRW enquiries 03000 653000 and ask for the Cadair Idris Senior Reserves Manager.

The following section refers to best practice guidance for those less familiar with the mountain environment for you to share with your groups.



Wild Swimming

Wild Swimming The pristine, clear water upland lakes on Cadair are unspoilt and protected as statutory features in European and British law. If you are contemplating swimming ensure there is no cross contamination between water bodies by avoiding swimming in any other lakes prior to your visit. Follow the 'Check, Clean, Dry' campaign guidelines.



Wild Camping

Wild Camping Wild camping is discouraged on Cadair Idris. There are several fantastic campsites on the flanks of Cadair, ranging from fully equipped to basic. If you are contemplating wild camping then always follow the wild camping code of conduct; try and minimise your visual presence by using an unobtrusive coloured tent and erecting it after dusk. Always support the principle of leaving no trace.



Cairns

Cairns Cadair Idris suffers from a proliferation of stone cairns. Stone cairns damage fragile habitats such as moorland and scree, together with the animals and plants associated with them. They can also cause new footpaths which can exacerbate erosion in the mountains and leads to people not using a map or compass when navigating. Please encourage individuals to refrain from adding to or building stone cairns.



Litter

Litter Litter in the mountains is an increasing problem. Add into your session a discussion on the impact of littering and as a group carry out all litter you find. Communicate that there is no 'acceptable' waste, not even that which is biodegradable, such as banana peels and apple cores. It takes 2 years for an orange peel to biodegrade!



Ground Nesting Birds

Ground Nesting Birds The nests of meadow pipits, skylark & stonechat are sometimes just a scrape in the earth, which can leave them vulnerable to predation & disturbance. Dogs running free can have significant detrimental effects to their breeding success. Under the CROW Act, dogs on open access land must be kept on a short lead between 1 March to 31 July to prevent disturbance to livestock and ground nesting birds.



CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS

The European Union have identified the most important sites for wildlife in Europe as the **Natura 2000** sites. There are two types of Natura 2000 sites:

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** - in Wales are areas that have been designated specifically to conserve wild birds that are listed as rare and vulnerable in the Birds Directive. They also include the sites in Wales that migratory birds use as stop-off points on their journeys across the planet.

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** - have been chosen to make a significant contribution to conserving habitats and wildlife species other than birds, named in the EC Habitats Directive.

In addition to these international designations there are a number of UK conservation designations:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** are the most important sites for Wales' natural heritage and are legally designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They help

conserve and protect the best of our wildlife, geological and physiographical heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

- **National Nature Reserves (NNRs)** are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, or under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Wales has 76 NNRs that help protect a wide range of wildlife and landscapes. All NNRs in Wales are legally protected as SSSIs. Most are also declared under the EU Habitats Directive as SACs, SPAs or Ramsar (wetlands).

OTHER RESOURCES

Welsh in the Outdoors - www.anturenwau.com & www.mudandrout.es.com/get-to-grips-with-welsh-names-on-your-map (bit.ly/2jp85hB)

Cadair Idris National Nature Reserve - www.naturalresources.wales/cadairidris (bit.ly/2ztCWAd)

Wild Camping Code of Conduct - www.snowdonia.gov.wales/visiting/walking/where-can-you-go/wild-camping (bit.ly/2k2RjJ6)

Check, Clean, Dry - www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry (bit.ly/1sPrPvX)

CREDITS

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